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EWDIGATE PRIZE POEM.

TROY:

:D IN THE THEATRE, OXFORD,

JUNE 21, 1876,

BY

ILLIAM MONEY HARDINGE,

Balliol Coll.

Oxford:

HRIMPTON & SON, BROAD STREET.

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THE ARGUMENT.

THE traveller in the Troad sees, in the sunset, as it were a vision of past heroes, and Helen; who being but a shade of old, after the story of Herodotus, abideth yet over against Troy, and is the spirit of beauty and mother of heroism for all time; though of the Greek host that came up against the city nothing remains save the broken witness of tombs, nor aught of the great armies of Xerxes, who did homage on Ida.

"Is this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burned the topless towers of Ilium?"

MARLOWE'S FAUSTUS.

ΗΜΕΙΣ ΔΕ ΚΛΕΟΣ ΟΙΟΝ ΑΚΟΥΟΜΕΝ.

Iliad ii. 486.

TROY.

LOOK to the West, the sun lies red and low;
The lazy clouds drift o'er, and shadows grow
Where the grey land slopes idly to the sea:
The air is soft with night's serenity,
And charmëd evening breathes a hush profound
On every acre of this storied ground.
Sacred the city these lone plains enthral,
Their thyme-sweet pasture is the royal pall
Of towers o'erthrown and burning hearts, that lie
One with the soil where virtue bade them die.

Lo, through the falling darkness, at our side,
Dreamy and dim the pine-clad hills abide
That knew the footsteps of the Phrygian boy,
And here, beneath our feet, was very Troy.
It needs not earth be riven, to disclose
Sepultured urns to witness Priam's woes;
Though in her state the city stood confessed,
The eyes were blind that saw the vision best.
Like some wan ghost uprising from the tomb
Pale from a thousand years of sunless gloom,—
(Or like a queen who died when time was young,
Some fair queen, oft by minstrel voices sung,
Found by a later age, which never shall
Know all the glories of her burial;
Whose jewelled vesture of the years gone by
Shrouds the dead face that is a memory)—
This city, which was queen of cities, when
Men walked as gods, and gods befriended men,
Not all discrowned, nor unapparelled, lies
Beneath this sunset of her Asian skies,
Even yet, though prone her listening citadel

She hears afar the sounding Pontus swell,
The ceaseless thunder of unslumbering seas,
That hymn her heroes to the Chersonese.

But ah! what later hour shall bring to her
Such hearts heroic as these mounds inter?
Scamander sings them,—hushed that healing wave
Where Hector staunched the wound that Ajax gave—
And Ida bears them laurels; all in vain—
They wake them not to victory or pain.
Their gods, their gods are dead, and never more
Shall haunt dark ships upon this hallowed shore,
Shall guide the arrow sped, the javelin hurled,
Or shew Achilles to the wildered world.

Sleep they or wake, who woke so well in life?
Surely, new-born for some diviner strife
They wield the winds for weapons, and the skies
Sunburnished, are their mailëd panoplies.
Yea now, even now, beneath this Eastern night
The vales are lit, and all the land is bright;

Rays, as of opal and of amethyst
Kindle to forms the ever-nearing mist—
And wizard fancy peoples all the plain
With ghosts that lived as none shall live again.
Ah now, methinks, tall Troy transfigured stands,
Her walls arise, they burst their mouldering bands;
Her dead awake to battle, each his mate
Rouses to onset at the Scæan gate;
The cloudy heavens assume the dense array,
And send their shadowy legions to the fray.
Lo, here the strangers from sublimer realm
Lift the loud shield and don the plume-swept helm;
Their feet are lightnings through the summer air,
And in their crests the spangled stars they wear.
With either conscious host their lot they choose,
They lose the day to win, they win to lose.
Nor fails the hero's heart: their tempest-tread
Scares not the soul of dauntless Diomed.

The clangour stills; we feel the silence stirred
By tender throbbing of some piteous word,

And the low pleading of Andromache
Rings clear against the night; for where is he,
Dear as to her, to us? His life is stayed
For whom that prayer was urged, that plaint was made.
Loud from the walls resounds the chariots' ring,
White clouds of dust the bounding axles fling
To hide the shameless deed; the ground we tread
Is ruddy with the trail of Hector dead!—
Spread wide your glades, Elysian fields, afar;
And let his soul forget Achilles' car,
Recall his wife's embrace, nor reck her doom,
Remember all the glory. . . Through the gloom
Lightens the face he died for. This is she,
Her very self and not a memory;
Aye, this is she who taught her lord to prove,
With such a sacrifice, so little love;
This is no semblance from the sunset made—
She is not dead, that this should be her shade,
Who never was but shadow, stol'n away
From twilit marriage of the dawn with day.
Who art thou if not Helen?—'Nay, for she,

'In lotus-wreathen meadows oversea,
'Sits dreaming on a bank of asphodel,
'And life is glad for her, and all is well.
'Not in her ear the Libyan songs are loud,
'Nor she forgets her land, amid the crowd
'Of Apis' worshippers; for, when the night
'Touches her gracious head with mellower light,
'Full swift her truant fancies wont to roam
'To Argolis, her surf-resounding home;
'Till forth she wanders, moving pale and fair,
'While night-dews dim the splendours of her hair;
'Listless her aspect, and her gesture slow;
'The skies are watching, those same skies that know
'Of all the havoc she has made in Troy,
'But may not tell her teen to mar her joy.
'The violet-veinëd eyelids lift—the eyes
'Turn from the helpless heavens and silent skies
'To mazy Nile, whose rippling water-bars
'Splinter the mirrored gold of stranger stars'—
Who art thou if not Helen? 'I was born
'Of mist and air,—and by the gods, in scorn,

'Set in this city for a brand of fire,
'Empress alike and handmaid of desire.
'For nought escapes the high gods' boundless ken
'And, seeing the earth was overborne of men
'Who dwelt together calmly and at ease,*
'They made me to bring toil on all of these—
'A soulless spirit whose Lethæan breath
'Wafted earth's princes to the vales of death.
'Methinks no woman, that had seen them there
'For her sake fallen, broad of limbs and fair,
'With clear eyes fronting death, and unafraid
'So that the sight of her, like balm, were laid
'After long vigil, on them,—nay not one
'Most loved and most unloving 'neath the sun

* Schol. ἡ δὲ ἱστορία παρὰ Στασίνῳ τῷ τὰ Κύπρια πεποιηκότι, εἰπόντι οὕτως.

"ἦν ὅτε μυρία φύλα κατὰ χθόνα πλαζόμενα . . .
. . . . . βαρυστέρνου πλάτος ἄιης
Ζεὺς δ' ἰδὼν ἐλέησε καὶ ἐν πυκιναῖς πραπίδεσσι
Σύνθετο κουφίσαι ἀνθρώπων παμβώτορα γαίαν," etc.

'But had grown weary of the dole she wrought;
'To me, poor careless wraith, all these were nought,
'Who fain were one with that cool breeze that fills
'The hollows of the Dryad-haunted hills.'

She sighed, but passed not: Lo, the night aflame
With myriad blaze of starlight, and there came
A glimpse of all the fires that marred the crown
Of heavenward turrets round th' embattled town,
When o'er the city of the gods' desire
Floated the smoke-wrapt torch that lit her pyre;
For one brief hour she brightened all the sky,
And snow-clad mountains blushed to see her die;
Then, with her sons, she buried all her shame,
And nought was left her, but a scathless name.

More strange that later gloom which wrapt thy height,
Ida, when through the murk tempestuous night

Reverberate thunder whelmed with baneful fear*
Proud Xerxes' minions, and the warnings drear
Downshaken from each dusky-feathered pine
Seemed the dread utterance of a voice divine.
The heavens foreshadow doom, the meteors gleam,
Scamander, dazed, denies his sullen stream ;
The astounded King his empty worship plies,
And scares each sacred shade with sacrifice.
Vain all his rite—the goddess hides her smile,
(From hands unhallowed goodliest gifts are vile,)
The serpent hosts with reverent horror quail,
Dark fear descends upon their glistening trail ;
Till with the dawn they pass.—O dale and hill !
You rest in majesty triumphant still,
Yours is the strength and awe ! yea, these are gone,
Their pride is perished and their boasting done ;

* Cf. in Herod. VII. the account of Xerxes' sacrifice in the Troad before he starts for Abydos,—and subsequently "ταῦτα δὲ ποιησαμένοισι νυκτὸς φόβος ἐς τὸ στρατόπεδον ἐνέπεσε."

But yet, for halo, shines on Ida's head
The deathless presence of her holy dead.

Let us arise and go! The breeze awakes,
And, down the eastern summits, morning breaks,
Here, where amid the ashes of her sons
The city kneeleth at her orisons.
Hers is the fount of poetry, that dries
Never, nor fails throughout the centuries,
And forth to alien lands fresh channels fling
The same sweet guerdon from her single spring.
Here dwells the shade of Helen: and though time
Call her by diverse names in many a clime
The kingdoms fall, but her reign is not done
Who gives to many, but the gift is one.
Yea, though the ages, darkling, pass away,
She holds an ageless empire in her sway,
Hath still that beauty of the days of yore
But with young years is ever young once more:

As now—new sunlight flushing all the land—
This twilit plain, from dawn's magician hand
Wins other aspect, and across the wold
The silver river grows a thread of gold.

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